



EAZA Statement on Culling of Animals During the COVID-19 Crisis

Amsterdam, 15 April 2020: The European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) has seen media reports outlining a possible need for European zoos to cull animals in response to the COVID-19 crisis, and referencing an interview conducted with Neumunster Zoo in Germany. Like any organisation at this time, our Members are planning for all eventualities, including those that could mean zoos and aquariums remaining closed well into the summer and without any source of income. All crisis plans that imagine a worst-case scenario are necessarily alarming at first sight, however there is no suggestion that culling of animals due to financial stresses caused by the COVID-19 crisis is immediately necessary for our Members.

EAZA does not attempt, and has never attempted to hide, the fact that some of our Member zoos feed meat to carnivores and omnivores in our care that occasionally comes from the carcasses of animals from the zoo. Predators need to eat animal protein, and there is no ethical difference between feeding the meat of farmed animals and the meat of certain zoo animals. These animals are selected carefully, killed humanely and without any compromise to their welfare, and the practice is entirely acceptable according to the regulations of our Association.

As things stand, there should be no immediate need to cull animals at a higher rate to feed carnivores in the care of our Members due to the Covid19 pandemic. Welfare and care of the animals remains at the high standard EAZA requires thanks to the dedication of staff, who are counted as key workers in many countries across our region.

Across Europe and beyond, governments and other authorities have recognized the problems facing zoos and aquariums at a time when their expenses continue, but their revenue has decreased to zero. In most cases, representation by national zoo associations and zoos themselves means that governmental plans are formulated to support the immediate continued operation of these institutions; where no such plans currently exist, we believe that this is due in the main part to the speed at which support measures have had to be designed, and that many of these gaps will be filled in the coming weeks. EAZA continues to support our Members and continues to look for additional measures which could help Members to weather the crisis or where necessary and possible, transfer animals to other institutions. It is worth noting also, that an accredited zoo can provide a relatively safe outdoor environment where it is possible for visitors and staff to maintain social distancing; as a result, we also recommend that governments consider allowing the reopening of zoos as soon as it is safe to do so.

The COVID-19 crisis appears to have demonstrated the damage that loss of biodiversity and the wildlife trade can inflict on human society. Education and conservation will be at the forefront of the fight to save species and biodiversity, and zoos and aquariums are well placed to continue fulfilling that role. EAZA therefore commends European governments for the support committed to our Members' future and calls for further measures to ensure that viable conservation and education facilities not covered by current planning do not disappear from our region unnecessarily.

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